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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION ON SECSTATE VISIT TO REGION

Editorial Commentary

-- "Rice's mission: solution or escalation?"

Chief Editor Taher Odwan writes on the back-page of independent, mass-appeal Arabic daily Al-Arab Al-Yawm (10/01): "It is no secret that Rice's new mission will address two issues. The first is activating the Palestinian-Israeli track, and the second is the Iranian nuclear file. The link between the two files is inevitable, because what Washington is proposing is very clear: an American movement on the Palestinian track in return for a regional Arab alliance supportive of it in its confrontation with Iran. We do believe that the objective of Rice's mission is to mobilize the Arabs against Iran, but we do not believe at all that there is an American intent or willingness to resolve the Middle East cause. Since we saw Rice roaming the region during the war on Lebanon and refusing an immediate ceasefire while announcing a new Middle East to rise from the ashes and destruction, it has become our right to be skeptical of her new mission that is connecting between the nuclear file and standing up to the axis of Tehran, Damascus, Hizbollah and the Hamas government on one hand, and a movement to resolve that Palestinian cause on the other. We do not believe because we have already heard and saw a similar thing before the occupation and destruction of Iraq.... Rice's new mission is doomed to failure because the expected foreign ministers meeting is not going to include Palestine, Syria and Lebanon. How is the peace process going to be revitalized with the absence with the main parties, and even more, with America's rejection of a dialogue with these parties and considering them 'part of the enemy'. The problem with the American diplomacy in the region is that it is designed for confrontation and not dialogue, for clashes not breakthroughs, for hot and cold wars and not pushing people towards negotiations and coexistence."

-- "The objective behind Rice's tour is not to consult but to dictate"

Columnist George Haddad writes on the op-ed page of center-left, influential Arabic daily Ad-Dustour (10/01): "Through Rice's tour that begins tomorrow, the Bush administration wants to tell the moderate Arab leaders that resolving the Palestinian crisis is subject to the ability to besiege the Palestinian 'extremism' and its sponsors like the Syrian regime, Iran and the Lebanese resistance. In other more direct and clearer words, Rice is not doing her tour to 'consult with a number of people' but rather to explain the American position and to demand abidance by it when it comes to the two issues: Iran's nuclear issue and movement on the

Palestinian track. Rice comes not to listen and consult, but to set conditions for the moderate Arabs."

-- "What does Rice have up her sleeve?"

Columnist Ramadan Rawashdeh writes on the op-ed page of semi-influential Arabic daily Al-Rai (10/01): "U.S. Secretary of State Rice may have ideas and her tour may be a public relations tour, but at the end of the day, she and the U.S. administration are responsible for what is happening in the region and what might happen in the future as a result of the frustration that is prevalent in Arab countries. The U.S. Secretary would be mistaken if she thinks that Iran is a priority for the Arabs. It is not. The priority for the Arabs is resolving the Palestinian issue and putting an end to the American occupation of Iraq."

-- "Rice deals with Arabs as mediators and not as relevant parties"

Columnist Sultan Hattab writes on the op-ed page of semi-official, influential Arabic daily Al-Rai (10/01): "The U.S. administration, whose policy in the region is being translated by Rice, must change its working methods that have been tried and led to only more complications and chaos, and there are ample examples of that in Iraq, Palestine, Afghanistan and Lebanon, and who knows where else. It is not right that we pay the cost of the mistakes of the American policy or that we be part of it when we can see that this policy is resulting only in igniting more and more fires and conflicts. This administration must hear out voices other than those of Israel and must see that its interests in the region lie not just with Israel. The Arabs must know, at least once, that this policy that is exercised against them and in the region does not serve their interests and the interests of their people and the stability of their countries. It has been proven that friendship with the United States is costly, and might entail more cost sometimes than the cost of opposing or rejecting these policies."

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